

October 23, 2016

But Nobody Ever Told Me... XXXIII

Tradition is surprisingly fragile. Once a link of the chain is broken, it is extremely difficult to reattach—and if it effects a second link—almost impossible. What often happens in many disciplines is that an older generation assumes that the younger generation knows how and why certain things are done. We can see this in everything from sports practices to cooking recipes.

As we look to close out our observance of this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, we want to make certain that we sure up the fundamentals—that our resolutions to avail ourselves of the Mercy of God are effective and sustainable for the rest of our lives. To this end, we will be concluding with the very basic building blocks of a mature person—lessons that our parents drilled into us as children: the ability to say “I’m sorry” and “thank you”.

Last week we raised the issue that god can forgive our sins any way He wants to, however Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Confession. Why?

In part III of his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas reasons that sin sets us on a trajectory away from God that we cannot arrest on our own. If we imagine sin as placing us on an inclined plain covered in pea-stones with nothing to grab onto or any way to stop our fall, we can begin to understand our plight. For us, the movement away from God resulting from one sin is unstoppable, never mind irreversible. Not only can we not stop, we cannot even *want* to stop(!) on our own.

Thomas goes on to reason that if the above is the case, then we cannot even repent (feel contrite) for our sins unless God placed that in our hearts. If God placed it in our hearts to repent, then it stands to reason that He is in the process of rescuing us—which means that He must have *already* forgiven us the offense!

To state it another way, God has already forgiven us the offense in order to arrest the fall and place repentance in our hearts. It therefore follows that all we need to do to complete the reconciliation is actually to apologize. If this is the case, then what in the world is the point of the Sacrament of Confession?! There *must* be more to it.

Last week we spoke of healing. That was to introduce the ‘more’ that Thomas came to understand. The Sacrament of Confession is necessary not so much for the forgiveness of sins, but the healing (from the sin) and strengthening (from God’s help) that results. This is why Jesus requires us to use the Sacrament.

We will pull this apart next week. Basically, the last time we studied the Sacrament in any significant way was in 2nd Grade when we were preparing for 1st Confession. It think it is time to have a more developed one.

Fr. Michael